

CHAPTER VIII

PROCURING OF OTHER FOOD AND DRINK

Whatever came across them they must needs kill and eat it ;
They made no distinction. If they saw a jackal they killed
And ate it ; no distinction was observed ; they respected not antelope,
sambhar and the like.
They made no distinction in eating a sow, a quail, a pigeon,
A crow, a kite, an adjutant, a vulture,
A lizard, a frog, a beetle, a cow, a calf, a he- and a she-buffalo,
Rats, bandicoots, squirrels—all these they killed and ate.
So began the Gonds to do. They devoured raw and ripe things.
(Hislop's version of the Lingo epic of the Gonds.)

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A. Food Gathering

FAMINE has never been a problem in Bastar, as the Marias and other tribes have always been able to draw half of their food supplies from the innumerable edible products of the vast forests. The difficulty is not so much to say what they collect and eat as what they do not ; in fact, if one were to take one of the lists of trees, shrubs and herbs compiled by the Central Provinces Forest Department, and copy from it the names of all edible forest products, one would not even then produce an exhaustive list. At page 124 above, many of the more important forest products collected and garnered were enumerated. *Mahua* (*Bassia latifolia*) is not common in the Alpujumar hills, where consequently little *mahua* spirit is distilled or drunk ; where it does occur, the Hill Marias collect its flowers and fruit as eagerly as cultivators throughout India. It is common in the Bison-horn country. The women and children gather the fallen flowers in the mornings. It is dried in the sun, and then stored in bamboo-wicker baskets ; it keeps a long time. It is used to flavour *pej* and *gato*, or roasted. Oil is pressed in the plains from the fruit. Tamarind trees are not really wild, but were originally planted around village sites ; the fruit is carefully gathered from all the unoccupied village sites. The fruits of the *achar* (*Buchanania latifolia*) and *tendu* (*Diospyros melanoxylon*) are two of the main sources of food supply. They collect also fruit of the *sona* (*Gmelina arborea*), *jamun* (*Eugenia jambolana*) and *aonla* (*Phyllanthus emblica*). Wild mangoes are common, and they are learning to cultivate the tree ; they store whole fruit, dried pulp, and kernels whole or crushed. In the south of the State the toddy palm (*Borassus flabellifer*) is the mainstay of the economic life of the people, but

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Their interest in these household occupations may be seen in scores of homely 883
riddles, which describe them in vivid symbol.

Drumming, drumming, what is that drum?
At cock-crow she is drumming.

A motiari is expected to be back from the ghotul by dawn and should be busy husking grain before her parents are awake.

A broom is 'the thing that licks quickly and then falls flat'; a leaf-plate is 'the little tank full of thorns' or 'the boy that morning and evening gives a share to all'; a pot of curds hawked round the village is described as 'the white cock going from house to house'.

But the main interest of chelik and motiari—for after all they are still only 262
boys and girls—is in food. 'Bheio bikhā hendiya me dāyā. As soon as morning comes, his mind is in the cooking-pot.' Of things to eat the Muria have a considerable variety, much more than would be available to people of similar economic status in a town. All the rich and varied products of the great Bastar jungles is open to them; the State has not yet interfered with their right to natural roots, fruit and leaves—they may take what they want so long as they do no damage.

As Grigson says of the Maria: 'The difficulty is not so much to say what they collect and eat as what they do not; in fact, if one were to take one of the lists of trees, shrubs and herbs compiled by the Central Provinces Forest Department and copy from it the names of all edible forest products, one would not even then produce an exhaustive list.'¹ I do not propose to give such a list here; but I will briefly mention the things that chelik and motiari like best. Meat and fish probably stand first in popularity—I will describe them later.

Among fruit trees, the mahua is supreme. When the flowers begin to fall, the cattle are kept tied up until the women and children have gathered them. They spread them in bright yellow patches swiftly turning brown on rocks, before their houses, in specially-made enclosures. When dry enough, the flowers are beaten with heavy sticks, sometimes with the wooden doors of a pigsty. The pulp is made into chutney with dried khameer fruit and tamarind kernels, and eaten with rice or gnoel. The oil is used for cooking and lighting. The flowers are stored in baskets, and make one of the most eagerly demanded gifts when the chelik make a dance tour of a village.

Another popular fruit is, of course, the mango. The motiari fetch baskets of wild mangoes from the forest where the trees grow in profusion, cut them up in the ghotul and give them with chilli and salt to the chelik.

Acacia fruit is liked, and there are many riddles about it. 'A green pigeon came from Porrobhan and laid its eggs on a leaf.' 'The white bird hides its eggs under its wings.' Other popular fruits are those of the thorny bhoir—'Mother bites, but daughter invites'; the kurli—'The little sparrow's liver is sweet'; the shima, the char, the jamun and the tamarind. Tendu fruit is picked while still unripe and put in kodon chaff to mature. Sometimes it is buried in the ground and a fire is lit above it. When ripe, it is eaten raw. 251
Wild figs are eaten ripe or dried and ground up with flour.



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FIG. 3.
Usual rice
basket
Length
5' 8" 262
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¹ Grigson, op. cit., p. 151.

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small pieces. When the Brahmin discovered it, he killed his wife and ripped open her belly in order to remove the meat and thus save her from a worse fate after death. But he found the child with one bit of beef in its mouth and the other in its hand: it cried, "It was not my mother who wanted it, but I myself" and so died. 262
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This story is popular and widespread. It is said that in olden days, the Maria and Muria regarded beef as taboo. But a Maria woman, like the Brahmin, developed a craving for it and ate some. When the husband was on the point of killing her, the child leapt out of the belly with a bit in its mouth and a bit in its hand crying, 'Not mother, but I'. From that day Maria and Muria have eaten beef.

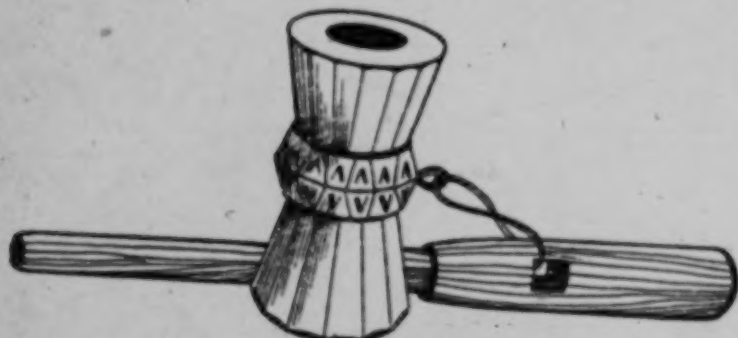


FIG. 6. Uspal used for pounding tobacco or haldi
Length 1' 9"

The Muria take their regular meals, when they are at home, three times a day. At about 10 in the morning they eat boiled rice and a few leaf-cups of jawa. Jawa is the Muria's staple food. It is made of rice, mandia grain, or any of the smaller millets, exactly as the Gond and Baiga of the Central Provinces make *pej*. Mandia-jawa, however, has its special methods of preparation. The mandia is ground into flour and soaked in water for two days. Rice or kodon is put to boil and when half-cooked the mandia flour is added, the pot filled up with water and rice and flour are cooked together. This preparation is called *gawji*. At about 3 in the afternoon the Muria has a few leaf-cups of stale jawa, and then at 8 in the evening he again has boiled rice, this time with pulse of various kinds. 264
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At every meal, there is chutney of tamarind, mango or mahua; any roots or vegetables available are cooked with chilli, haldi or garlic; meat, fish or eggs may be added. These delicacies vary, of course, from day to day, but the main diet rarely changes. [263] ●

The Muria's kitchen is the simplest place possible. A horseshoe hearth of earth is made in a corner on the ground; half-a-dozen different earthen pots are used; there may be a wooden spoon and certainly some gourd ladles. Without increasing the cost, the standard of the cookery could be enormously improved; it has always astonished me no one has tried to improve village cookery in India. 354
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When there is a feast, or at a marriage, most of the cooking is done out of doors and by the *chalik*. Long narrow trenches are dug in the ground, filled 252

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222 had to give a penalty feast to its tribe. It had everything ready save
 539 char nuts. When it heard where Waddai was going, it promised to cure his
 son if he would give it the nuts. The monkey went to the house, pretended
 to fall into a trance, shaking its head and body, and the boy at once recovered.
 The monkey told Waddai that he should always cure disease in this way.

'The sun had now set and Waddai went half-way with the monkey to see
 it home. It was very pleased with the nuts and took Waddai to a honey-
 comb, drove away the bees and gave the sweet juice and wax to him. Since
 that day, we have eaten honey and as Waddai took the first honey at night,
 we take it then also.'

222 The Muria distinguish four kinds of bees: the *bāgh ondār*, which live on big
 [P5] trees; the *satāru ondār*; the small *kitha ondār* and the *lokti ondār* or *mas*.¹ It is
 said that the hives of the *bāgh* and *satāru ondār* are discovered when they go
 according to their habit to get water from a trickling stream. Men go along
 the stream until they notice bees coming and going and then try to follow
 them home. The *lokti* are easier to find because they sit buzzing outside
 their hole, and the honey-gatherer is attracted to the place by the noise.
 Muria observation is shown by this account: 'All the swarm seek flowers
 and suck their sweet juice. As the bees sit on the flowers gum sticks to their
 feet. With this they build their hive, and put the juice inside. They build
 so well that not a drop leaks out.'

'Only a brave man will go for honey', say the Muria. When they have
 located a hive, two or three men go together; for the *bāgh ondār* (which are
 blind in the dark) they go at night. They tie grass at the end of a pole, light
 it and smoke out the bees. Then they place a bamboo ladder against the
 tree and climb up, though sometimes they cut the tree down to save themselves
 trouble, and collect the honey in hollow bamboo tubes.

• [47] The honey is eaten with wheat-cakes or mixed with flour and made into a
 [26] sweet bread which is greatly liked by children.

Sometimes if the honey-gatherer is unsuccessful in finding a hive, he engages
 the Siraba or Gunia who searches for it with the help of the winnowing-fan or
 bits of grass. When he climbs the tree to get the honey, he calls upon the
 Dead to assist him.

[77] Should a swarm make their hive in or near a house, it is considered very
 lucky.²

524 The Muria's interest in honey-gathering is indicated by the number of riddles
 about it.³

¹ Compare Thurston on the Konds: 'The Konds recognize four different kinds of
 bees, known by the following Oriya names: (a) *bhaga moku*, a large-sized bee (*Apis
 dorsata*); (b) *asthapuri moku*, building its comb in seven layers (*Apis indica*); (c) *binchins
 moku*, with a comb like a fan; (d) *nibiti moku*, a very small bee.'—Thurston, op. cit.,
 Vol. III, p. 363. I have found similar classifications among the Juang and Gadaba.

[77] ² 'It is considered very lucky if bees or white ants take up their abode in an empty
 house or at the gate of the city.'—N.I. *Notes and Queries*, Vol. V (1895), p. 53. See also
ibid., p. 90. Many Naga actually hang the combs of bees or wasps in front of their houses,
 perhaps to frighten away wild cats: the Sema say they help to hatch hen's eggs; the
 Thado Kuki say they ward off evil spirits. Hutton recalls similar beliefs in the Andamans
 and Malays, and adds 'I am disposed to suspect the survival of a definitely Negro belief
 in the practice of hanging the combs of bees or wasps in the entrance of houses.'—J. H.
 Hutton, *Diaries of Two Years in the Unadministered Area east of the Naga Hills* (Calcutta,
 1929), p. 6.

³ A Kheria riddle about the honeycomb: 'In a golden box bells are sounding; when
 you open it, you get sweet bread.'—S. C. Foy, *The Kharis* (Ranchi, 1937), Vol. II, p. 459.